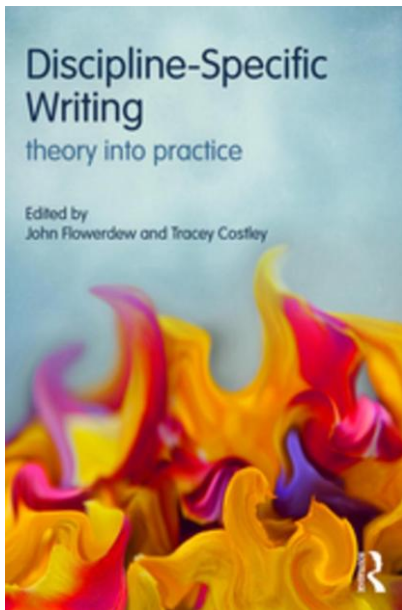


BOOK REVIEW



DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC WRITING AT UNIVERSITY, FOR ESP AND BEYOND

John Flowerdew and Tracey Costley (Eds.). DISCIPLINE-SPECIFIC WRITING: THEORY INTO PRACTICE (2017), London: Routledge. 217 pp., ISBN 978-1-138-90744-7 (PBK).

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The recent publication of this edited book makes a most welcome contribution to the literature in the increasingly important field of discipline-specific writing in academic contexts. I value the opportunity to review it for this special edition of *ESP Today*, especially because it has encouraged me to investigate the relationships between the specific academic context from which each contributor writes and the contribution itself. In particular, I have been interested in the specific pedagogical practices and possibilities assumed in each contribution. For example, an important question for me is whether the piece envisages teaching discipline-specific academic writing to users of English as a first (EL1) and as an additional language (EAL) together, or in separate cohorts. Another involves the extent to which the piece engages with theoretical notions that can contribute to efforts to establish or strengthen collaborative work by content and language specialists – a need identified by several contributors.

The first of the 13 chapters, the editors' "Introduction", explains the book's origin in the Summer Institute for Creative and Discovery-based Approaches to Teaching University English for Specific Disciplines held at City University of Hong Kong in 2014, augmented by additional commissioned chapters. The goal is to

provide “comprehensive coverage of the different elements that combine to make a discipline-specific writing course” (p. 1), including those that need to be taken into consideration in the conceptualisation and planning stages. A very wide range of professional contexts for potential readers is given in the “Using this book” subsection, which suggests that the ideas and approaches presented are “germane to the teaching of disciplinary writing in any university context regardless of whether English is the medium of instruction or production, or not” (p. 2). The term English for Specific Purposes (ESP) is introduced to readers *from scratch*, in a section that follows several dealing with disciplinarity, its importance, and broad approaches to incorporating it into the teaching of writing. Disciplinarity is defined as referring to “systems of knowledge, their creation and organisation, and the intellectual and teaching and learning practices that are associated with them” (p. 2). This wide-ranging coverage and audience reach give rise in part to the approach, described in the first paragraph, that I have adopted in preparing this review for a specific ESP readership.

The editors then introduce a Curriculum Cycle with nine focuses that form the framework for the book’s structure, only one of which contains more than one chapter. These are focuses on 1) contexts for discipline-specific writing; 2) course design; 3) grammar; 4) vocabulary; 5) genre; 6) specific disciplines and genres (four chapters); 7) corpora; 8) critical approaches; and 9) assessment. As the editors themselves state, each focus provides an example, not a complete coverage or definitive account. Several design features of the book assist in the stated goal of support provision for teachers: the inclusion of relevant theory at the start of each chapter, the inclusion of discussion questions and additional activities at the end of chapters, and the placement of reference lists at the end of individual chapters.

“Investigating local and institutional contexts for discipline-specific writing” (Chapter 2) is authored by Richard Forest and Tracey S. Davis, both US academics. The chapter includes a succinct and highly effective summary of the relevant theoretical contexts, under three subheadings: Content-based approaches (immersion, sheltered, adjunct, and theme-based types, of which only traditional immersion lacks “an explicit language element in instruction” [p. 14]); Genre-based pedagogies (ESP, New Rhetoric, and the Sydney School); and Writing across the curriculum and writing in the disciplines (largely US-based and with limited focus on additional-language users of English to date). In their *Practical applications* section, the authors provide a toolkit for a “discourse-based approach to needs analysis [...] that teachers can use to explore the place of discipline-specific writing in their own institution” (p. 12). It includes a comprehensive list of potential data sources for analysis, and boxed questions that focus on power and institutional discourse; situational analysis; institutional discourses; and student discourses, including where and when students write in the disciplines. The toolkit presents a very usable framework for institutions where English is the home language, but may be harder to apply in contexts where English is a foreign language. Reformulating the questions to analyse documents written in the institution’s

home language on the topic of writing in English in the disciplines could be an interesting extension.

In her chapter “Developing writing courses for specific academic purposes”, Helen Basturkmen begins by describing a wide range of course types and student cohorts, mostly from a New Zealand perspective. She then covers key concepts and distinguishes narrow- and wide-angled ESP courses. EAP teaching is characterised as helping students develop abilities to communicate in English in academic settings, rather than delivering disciplinary knowledge, but Basturkmen notes that, although teachers of English of Specific Academic Purposes (ESAP) do not need specialised content knowledge, they arguably do require specialised knowledge such as that of disciplinary cultures, genres, and discourse. A useful set of references is included on this topic. A thorough rationale for ESAP courses is presented, followed by practical consideration of student and teacher factors relevant to deciding on an ESAP approach. Four types of course design cases are presented, followed by curriculum design processes, highlighting those that are especially demanding for ESAP courses: needs analysis and course content development. There is a useful section on ways to foster collaboration with disciplinary content specialists during these processes, a topic which is important for other chapters as well.

In “The role of grammar in the discipline-specific writing curriculum”, Lindsay Miller and Jack C. Richards present a case study of an intermediate level English for Science course at a university in Hong Kong in order to demonstrate how twelve principles for integrating grammar and texts are incorporated. These students bring considerable experience in learning grammar rules but limited ability to apply them, and the course is a blend of wide- and narrow-angled approaches. Although these terms, and others, that have been introduced in previous chapters are recycled here, there is always sufficient context provided for each chapter to stand alone. The chapter uses extensive tables and cross-referencing to make the connections very clear, and the chapter ends with an endorsement of the use of corpus-based and corpus-informed approaches to inform grammar teaching into the future. These authors demonstrate how a well-planned task-based program can systematically address issues of grammar awareness and skill development.

Averil Coxhead’s “Approaches and perspectives on teaching vocabulary for discipline-specific academic writing” focuses on identifying, classifying, and using discipline-specific vocabulary. She uses findings from the field of vocabulary studies to emphasise the importance of discipline-specific vocabulary and the learning load it represents for EAL learners. EAP and corpus linguistics approaches are used to identify and classify different types of discipline-specific vocabulary, including bundles and strings, and frequencies of occurrence in different disciplines. Practical applications include planning for vocabulary use in writing, a useful set of principles for organising materials development, and an enhanced focus on vocabulary in feedback and assessment.

“Using genre analysis to teach writing in the disciplines” is by Sunny Hyon, based in the USA. After summarising the uses of genre analysis from an ESP perspective, and acknowledging the sometimes less enthusiastic uptake by scholars from rhetorical genre studies, she presents an activity series designed to introduce students to critique genres. The book review is the target genre, compared in the final activity with programme reviews, to highlight differences in moves and sequences between genres in the same family. Thus students learn about the target genre, genre families, and genres in general, providing multiple opportunities for transfer of knowledge when new genres are encountered. There is no indication of the characteristics of the student cohort taught, however, nor the assessment criteria for the writing task set – these additions would have added to the usefulness in my view.

Also from a New Zealand context, Jean Parkinson’s Chapter 7 is entitled “Teaching writing for science and technology” – this is the first of four chapters concerned with specific discipline contexts. She proposes the laboratory report as a valuable vector or transporter of disciplinary values for undergraduate students in these disciplines, with register concerns (tense, voice, hedging, nominalisation) nested within genre family issues (lab report, lab manual, design report, research report), nested within ideological concerns (objectivity, replicability, testability, maths to model problems, measurement of uncertainty, etc.). Parkinson highlights a difference in audience and purpose between this genre and the professional research article genre, and provides an extended breakdown of moves and a teaching sequence based on them that addresses all levels of the nested model. This approach seems likely to be effective in contexts where undergraduate students are still required to write lab reports, although in my (Australian) experience this is becoming less frequent.

Second in this set is “Using annotated bibliographies to develop student writing in social sciences”, by the UK-based Damian Fitzpatrick and Tracey Costley. Student cohorts are undergraduates from a wide range of social science disciplines, socio-economic backgrounds, first languages, and levels of English. Adopting an academic literacies approach, the authors propose that basing a writing course on annotated bibliographies relevant to each student’s program introduces reading practices into the classroom and allows a structured way for students to explore and develop their subject knowledge. Although the rationale and steps are clear, I would have appreciated more details of how the writing course was assessed and students recruited – so my curiosity was definitely piqued.

“Discipline-specific writing for business students: research, practice and pedagogy” is the third in the set, authored by Julio Gimenez. He reviews published conceptualisations of writing for business and compares them with findings of his own study of under- and post-graduate students and academic staff at a British university. Based on the similarities and differences identified between the two datasets, Gimenez presents a set of intriguing pedagogical activities designed to

move students towards writing for knowledge creation, rather than only knowledge display.

The final chapter in this set is “Teaching English for research publication purposes with a focus on genre, register, textual mentors and language re-use: a case study”, by John Flowerdew and Simon Ho Wang. The student cohort was 24 PhD students of science and engineering at a Hong Kong university. The first part of the chapter includes two very useful summary tables, one an inventory of moves and steps in (IMRD) research article writing, taken from the literature, and the other an inventory of linguistic (register) features found to be salient in realisations of these moves and steps by the students in the class. The authors’ discussion of textual mentors and language re-use, plus the case studies of two participants, should prove highly informative to teachers working in this area.

Returning to approaches applicable beyond a single-discipline context, Chapter 11 is “Introducing corpora and corpus tools into the technical writing classroom through Data-Driven Learning (DDL)”, by Laurence Anthony, based in Japan. I found this to be a very clear explanation of the current state of play in this area. Its first part incorporates a rationale for the use of these tools, sufficient theoretical discussion, clear discussion of strengths and weaknesses, and directions to available corpora and corpus tools. The second part demonstrates how DDL could be incorporated into a traditional writing classroom, and suggests methods for evaluating success.

Expanding on the question of whether a critical stance to disciplinary writing conventions is needed, broached earlier by Parkinson in her Discussion Questions, Chapter 12 is “Critical literacy writing in ESP: perspectives and approaches”, by Christian W. Chun. The teaching context is an English for Business Communications class in a Hong Kong university, but the issues raised have wider applicability. The first part of the chapter summarises relevant theory, but for me the unpacking of a classroom task of writing a business memo to staff, designed and presented from a critical literacy perspective, was what clarified and demonstrated the issues of power and “who benefits” and how they can be addressed in an ESP context.

The closing chapter is “Towards a specific writing language assessment at Hong Kong universities”, by Jane Lockwood. Grounded in a recently changed school-to-university situation, this chapter provides an in-depth look at the theoretical underpinnings and practical constraints involved in developing a new diagnostic assessment regime, initially for commencing undergraduate students but eventually to be used to track progress throughout students’ study for their first degrees. An issue of concern here, as in other chapters, is the need to engage discipline specialists in the teaching and assessment of student writing in their fields.

The volume thus meets its objective: to “provide support to experienced, novice and prospective teachers” (p. 10) in taking up the complex roles required to help learners meet the literacy demands of different disciplines. It highlights

connections between theorists and schools of thought, identifies commonalities of concern, and is always grounded in actual practice in real contexts.

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